6: Liao S-5 (1943-1945)1947 AF16 Southwest China AF16

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government, the society will provide and pay for a substitute to confess to the crime and to suffer the consequences in his stead.

Another reason for the continued existence of the Ko Lao Hui in Szechuan is the confusion and disorder which have prevailed there in recent years. During the war the central government, which had established its capital in Szechuan and was anxious to avoid unnecessary unrest, encouraged the provincial government in its lax administration. The attitude of compromise adopted toward most problems fostered the development of localism and gave the Ko Lao Hui an opportunity to increase the scope and variety of its activities to a point where it interfered with many aspects of government administration. In any case, government in Szechuan has been so corrupt for so long that the people have no confidence in it.[11] The war years simply aggravated popular dissatisfaction with and distrust of the government, so that any new official measure is received with suspicion. The people have become accustomed to managing their affairs and settling their disagreements by extra-governmental means. It is natural for them to turn to the local Ko Lao Hui branch director, who represents, in theory at least, the virtues of brotherhood, filial piety and proper behavior toward women. Thus the director has become not only the possessor of power but a symbol of righteousness as well. Disagreements between non-members of the society, as well as between members, are now commonly referred to him for settlement.

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The Ko Lao Hui is not a political party, nor does it entertain any pretensions regarding the shaping of national policy—so long as the interests of its middle-class founders are not endangered. Thus far Ko Lao Hui political activities have remained defensive. Individual members may occupy important government posts, but the society as a whole remains aloof from Kuomintang party politics. The society has voiced sharp criticism of Communism, which it regards as inimical to middle-class interests. While adopting a *laissez-faire* attitude toward politics,

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[11] The demobilization, in the closing years of the Sino-Japanese war, of many Szechuanese troops without adequate provision for their reemployment greatly swelled the number of undesirable members of the society, and in turn made things more difficult for the government. The possession by society members of an extraordinarily large number of small arms aggravates the situation. In the course of his investigation of two districts near Chengtu, the author learned that nearly every member of the Ko Lao Hui in those localities owned a pistol or a rifle. In Chengtu district one out of every two members possessed such arms without a license. Leaders not infrequently had late-model machine guns.

6: Liao S-5 (1943-1945) 1947 AF16 Southwest China AF16

575 the Ko Lao Hui keeps the closest watch over government policy, especially where it considers its own interests to be concerned.
662 An illustration of how the Ko Lao Hui functions in this respect may be seen in the typical case of Huang Jun Chin, branch director in the village of Yuan T'ung. To the people who live in it, Yuan T'ung seems less a village than a country of which Huang is king. He owns some 400 acres of land and several thousand side arms which are borne by 3,000 men (all society members) directly under his command. In the county seat he and some of his men occupy a huge mansion fortified with machine-gun emplacements. Several close relatives hold important positions in the municipal and provincial governments. Although they are paid by the county government, two platoons of guards and policemen are armed with Huang's guns and are answerable to him alone. His men are also in the magistrate's office; in fact, the magistrate is no more than a figurehead whose function it is to transmit government orders to Huang and to await his instructions. The county administration takes no action without Huang's prior consent. He not only presides over the county council, but appoints all of its other members. Huang's case is typical of the power of the society which, though essentially non-political, frequently interferes with, and occasionally assumes direct control of, county government.[12]

575 Each branch of the society derives its regular income from a number of sources, of which opium dens are the most important. In one
548 locality there are ten such dens, each run by a different high-ranking member. Each must contribute a definite sum to the branch, as must the semi-secret gambling houses and brothels. Illegal transactions in prohibited goods such as arms, gasoline and other vital war materials are effected under the supervision and protection of the society, which collects a fee on each transaction. Another source of income is the "mar-
575 ket" where, though no goods are handled, such commodities as rape
437 seed, rice and the like are bought and sold in wholesale quantities; since no goods are in evidence, the government agent, if he is present, sees nothing on which to levy a tax, but the society, keeping a com-

[12] Of course, the society manifests its power in other ways. For example, local coal mines and salt works cannot move their products to market until they have paid the society large sums on each shipment. Before making tours of inspection in the districts of the Chengtu Plain, government officials are expected to notify, and to secure the protection of, Ko Lao Hui officials. This procedure is necessary because bandits, county guards and administrators are usually all members of the society.